Is your school or setting following the SEND Code of Practice?

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 has been the catalyst for the biggest changes in provision for pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND) in a generation. But how are schools, early years and further education settings managing to meet its requirements and recommendations? We take a look at some of the commonly raised aspects of the code and offer some practical advice.

Person-centred practice: children and young people

The code covers the age range 0-25, and quite rightly places the child or young person at the centre of decision making. In practice this means they need to be prepared for, and supported to become actively involved in, setting targets as well as evaluating their own progress towards them. It also means actively identifying what is important to them now and in the future. Person-centred practice is a thread which is evidenced in all aspects of school life and which may need to involve a real culture change.

Person-centred practice: parents and carers

Due to their age and/or needs, some children and young people with SEND cannot advocate on their own behalf. It is parents and carers who are the experts regarding their child, and their knowledge can really help professionals as part of a partnership approach. But remember that parents and carers may not be familiar with the educational terms and processes used by professionals so it is important to ensure that they have the information they need to make informed decisions, and to keep regular lines of communication open.

The graduated approach

Don't be afraid of it – assess, plan, do, review is what you do all the time when teaching. But remember that ‘do’ is really important; ensure that you and your colleagues are actually ‘doing’
what’s been planned and allowing enough time for it to have an impact, whether this is running an intervention or trying out a new way of presenting information, for example.

**SEMH and ‘behaviour’**

The change from ‘Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD)’ to ‘Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH)’ was one of the most significant in the new code; we now need to look past the behaviour to the underlying cause(s) i.e. what the behaviour is communicating. This works best if your whole school ethos emphasises mental health and wellbeing, starting with the premise that everyone in the setting will treat each other with respect and understanding within a resilient and nurturing environment. If there are needs that cannot be met from within your setting, use expertise as recommended by your SENCo.

**The broad areas of need**

The code clearly states ‘the purpose of identification is to work out what action the school needs to take, not to fit a pupil in a category’ so consider all of a pupil’s needs, not just those with which they have been labelled, alongside their strengths. Target support wherever it is most needed at any one time, remembering that this may change. If you believe a pupil’s needs are quite different to those described, discuss this with your SENCo.